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Letters

How Not to Investigate Assassinations

To the Editor:

Approximately seven months ago the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities issued a report detailing the evidence gathered during its five-month investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy. I participated in that investigation and in the drafting of the report. The investigation, admittedly, dealt with only a handful of unanswered questions surrounding the assassination. Indeed, we recommended that our successor, the permanent Senate Intelligence Committee, continue the investigation. Yet, it became increasingly obvious as our investigation progressed that even a massive investigative effort was unlikely to produce evidence that would dispositively answer the ultimate question of why President Kennedy was assassinated.

In September, the House overwhelmingly adopted a resolution establishing a select committee that would investigate the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Under Mr. Downing's chairmanship, that committee has for the past four months blazed a media trail of injudicious, inflammatory and often irresponsible public statements. These statements not only evidence that the committee has conducted its investigations in headline-grabbing fashion; they also unfortunately suggest a basic disregard for civil liberties and reveal that the committee is conducting yet another, albeit unauthorized, Congressional investigation of the intelligence agencies.

No events in recent history have shaken the country more than the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. The extremely sensitive nature of these investigations imposes upon the committee a special obligation to conduct the investigations judiciously and privately. The proper time for the committee to "go public" is at the conclusion of its investigations, when all the evidence can be presented to the public in a balanced fashion. Then, and only then, will the citizens of this country be in a position to reach their own informed conclusions with respect to the assassinations. They will also then be able to evaluate the performance of their intelligence agencies and, indeed, the performance of the House committee.

The select committee will soon submit for consideration by the House a resolution seeking, among other things, additional powers, two more years of life and $6.5 million. Unless the committee's new chairman, Representative Henry Gonzalez, demonstrates the ability and intention to conduct the investigations in a responsible fashion befitting the House, I urge that the House reject the proposed resolution in the overwhelming fashion with which it adopted the initial resolution establishing the committee.

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Washington, Jan. 14, 1977

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